

'We survived and we're still here'

ENCAMPMENT continued
from front page

Recreation Site that included coffee brewed by Tribal Council member Jon A. George and conversation and community while beading.

The Friday event attracted attendees from the Medford and Grants Pass offices of the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Eugene office of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Southern Oregon Historical Society.

After an invocation by George and drumming performed by George and Cultural Protection Coordinator Jordan Mercier, Tribal Council Chairman Reyn Leno welcomed those in attendance.

"This is always a meaningful trip for us to come down here," Leno said. "We always talk about Table Rock and our treaties down here."

Leno said that Tribal members now identify themselves as Grand Ronde, but before Restoration in 1983 they had to state which Tribe they were from, such as Rogue River or Umpqua.

"A lot of people at Grand Ronde are Rogue and Umpqua," Leno said. "That's how we grew up. ... Our grandparents and our aunts and uncles and our families talked about Table Rock. They knew where they were from. They knew their history and their culture. So it was a meaningful thing to us to get to where we could come down and do this event and know we walk in the footprints of our ancestors and what Table Rock means to us."

Mercier presented an overview of the Tribe's two treaties ceding land in the area to the U.S. government and discussed the Tribe's history in southern Oregon, from pre-settler arrival to the Rogue River Indian Wars to the Trail of Tears that started at Table Rock on Feb. 23, 1856, and ended on March 25, 1856, in Grand Ronde.

Mercier said he can trace his ancestry back to Martha Jane Sands, a member of the Takelma who was one of the first people to arrive in Grand Ronde.

"We survived and we're still here," Mercier said. "We still view this place and our lands as sacred. We have a deep spiritual connection to these lands. This is where we come from. We have stories that tie us to these lands. We have stories about the creation of Table Rock. ... We're tied to these lands in an inseparable relationship."



Photos by Michelle Alaimo

Tribal Council Chairman Reyn Leno, right, talks with Pat Harper, left, and Diane Drews from the Southern Oregon Historical Society during "Coffee & Conversation with the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde" at the Courtyard Marriott in Medford on Friday, Sept. 25. Omar Ortiz with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers also attended.

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Mercier said that is how the Grand Ronde Tribe approaches development projects that is it asked to review in its ceded lands, such as timber harvests, construction of cell phone towers or proposed sewer projects.

"The Tribe brings a perspective to projects that no one else has," Mercier said. "We are the inheritors as the Tribe and peoples of this land. We have that special interest and way of looking at it."

Diane Drews, development director with the Southern Oregon Historical Society, said she attended the Coffee and Conversation event because her organization is preparing to create a Native American encampment at its Hanley Farm site in Central Point, just north of Medford.

Drews said the Historical Society wants to partner with the Grand Ronde Tribe, as well as the Siletz and Cow Creek, to ensure the encampment will be historically and culturally accurate.

"This is singularly important to us that this be done correctly," Drews said about the project, which is in the beginning stages of a five-year plan.

Drews said she has already contacted Grand Ronde Tribal Historic Preservation Officer David Harrelson about the project and Mercier encouraged her to keep the Tribe informed as the project progresses.

Mercier said Hanley Farm is a known Native American village site that is on private property and that the Tribe appreciates the Historical Society's desire to partner.

Drews was accompanied by Historical Society archivist Pat Harper.

Cheryle Foster-Curley, district archaeologist and Tribal liaison with the Bureau of Land Management's Medford District office, asked about partnership opportunities with the Grand Ronde Tribe.

Leno said the Tribe is always interested in partnering with county, state and federal agencies and mentioned the recent land donation the Tribe accepted from the Tillamook County Board of Commissioners at Kilchis Point as an example.

"I think there is a lot of opportunity and we're certainly open to it," Leno said.

After Public Affairs Administrative Assistant Chelsea Clark and Tribal Council Chief of Staff Stacia Martin helped George distribute gifts and informational packets, the meeting ended, but the conversation did not.

Tribal Attorney Rob Greene talked with BLM archaeologists while Leno continued talking with Drews and Harper about historical Tribal cultural practices.

Also attending the Friday event were Tribal Council Secretary Cheryle A. Kennedy and Tribal Council members Ed Pearsall and Tonya Gleason-Shepek, Tribal Council Administrative Assistant Shannon Simi, Interim General Manager David Fullerton, Tribal Elder Laura Gleason and Tribal youth Desirae Martin.

After the Coffee & Conversation event ended, Greene lead a Tribal hike up Table Rock that included George, Gleason-Shepek, Clark, Simi, the Martins and Tribal photographer Michelle Alaimo.

The next day along the shores of the Rogue River, a Tribal encampment occurred at TouVelle State Recreation Site from 10 a.m. to 2

p.m.

Tribal artisan Travis Stewart and his wife, Esther, and daughter, Sophia, drove down so that he could display woodwork he has been carving as a member of the Tribe's Culture Department.

Meanwhile, George, Simi, Clark, Martin, Gleason-Shepek and her mother, Laura, beaded and drank George's wagon trail-strong coffee as the sound of nearby rapids serenaded them.

The encampment provided Tribal Elder Kathy Kain and her husband, Rick, a chance to visit with fellow Tribal members. Kain, who is descended from the Molallas, lives in Phoenix just south of Medford. She drove up to TouVelle to inquire about Tribal colors for a Native American afghan she plans on making.

Kain and her husband received necklaces created on the spot by George and also pre-packaged bead packets to take home from Clark.

"We missed this last year's event because I had to go to Georgia to visit family," Kain said.

Meanwhile, Gleason-Shepek helped Clark and Desirae Martin gather rocks along the river's shore to add to the Atudship rock mound adjacent to the Tribal Cemetery in Grand Ronde.

The encampment also gave Tribal member Lisa Huff and her daughter, Kaylie, a chance to visit her brother, Travis Stewart.

The encampment celebrates the anniversary of the 1853 treaty signing at Table Rock, as well as the Tribe's 2011 memorandum of understanding with the Bureau of Land Management and The Nature Conservancy.

The memorandum gives the Grand Ronde Tribe the right to manage almost 5,000 acres of pristine land around Table Rock. Each year since 2012, Tribal members have set up demonstrations of Grand Ronde culture and hands-on experiences at the state park. ■



Tribal Council member Tonya Gleason-Shepek, left, and Tribal members Desirae Martin, middle, and Chelsea Clark, also Tribal Public Affairs administrative assistant, collect rocks from the Rogue River to add to the Atudship rock mound at the Tribal Cemetery during the Table Rock Tribal Encampment at TouVelle State Recreation Site in Central Point.